

Letter 089
Dordrecht, 22 March 1877

Dear Theo,

I want you to have a letter from me on your journey. What a pleasant day we had together in Amsterdam; I stayed and watched your train until it was out of sight. We are such old friends already – how often haven't we walked the black fields with the young green corn together at Zundert, where at this time of the year we would hear the lark with Father.

This morning I went to Uncle Stricker's with Uncle Cor and had a long talk there on you know what subject. In the evening at half past six Uncle Cor took me to the station. It was a beautiful evening and everything seemed so full of expression, it was still and the streets were a little foggy, as they so often are in London. Uncle had had toothache in the morning, but luckily it didn't last. We passed the flower market on the way. How right it is to love flowers and the greenery of pines and ivy and hawthorn hedges; they have been with us from the very beginning.

I have written home to tell them what we did in Amsterdam and what we talked about. On arrival here I found a letter from home at the Rijken's. Father was unable to preach last Sunday and the Reverend Mr. Kam stood in for him. I know that his heart burns for something to happen that will allow me to follow in his footsteps, not just some of the way, but all the way. Father has always expected it of me, oh, may it come about and blessings be upon it.

The print you gave me, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away," and the portrait of the Reverend Mr. Heldring are already up in my little room, oh, how glad I am to have them, they fill me with hope.

Writing to you about my plans helps me to clarify and settle my thoughts. To begin with, I think of the text, "It is my portion to keep Thy word." I have such a craving to make the treasures of the Bible's word my own, to become thoroughly and lovingly familiar with all those old stories, and above all with everything we know about Christ.

In our family, which is a Christian family in the full sense of the term, there has always been, as far as one can tell, someone from generation to generation who was a preacher of the Gospel. Why should there not be a member of our family even now who feels called to that ministry, and who has some reason to suppose that he may, and must, declare himself and look for means of attaining that end? It is my prayer and fervent desire that the spirit of my Father and Grandfather may rest upon me, that it may be granted me to become a Christian and a Christian labourer, that my life may come to resemble, the more the better, those of the people I have mentioned above – for behold, the old wine is good and I do not desire new. Let their God be my God and their people my people, let it be my lot to come to know Christ in His full worth and to be impelled by His charity.

It is so beautifully put in the text, "As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," what that charity is, and in Cor. 13 she "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity never faileth."

My heart is filled today with the text about those on the way to Emmaus, when it was toward evening and the sun was going down: "But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us."

It is dear to you, too, that "sorrowful, yet always rejoicing," keep it in mind, for it is a good text and a good cloak to wear in the storm of life, keep it in mind at this time now that you have been going through so much. And be careful, for though what you have been through is no small thing, yet as far as I can see there is something still greater ahead, and you too will be put in mind of the Lord's word: I have loved you with an everlasting Love, as one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you. I shall comfort you as one who comforteth his Mother. I shall give you another Comforter, even the Spirit of truth. I will make a new covenant with you. Depart, touch no unclean thing, and I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God. And I will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters. Hate the evil and the places where it is rife, it draws you with its false splendour and will tempt you as the devil tried to tempt Christ by showing Him "all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them"; and saying, "All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me." There is something better than the glory of the things of this world, namely the feeling when our heart burns within us upon hearing His word, faith in God, love of Christ, belief in immortality, in the life hereafter.

Hold on to what you have, Theo, my boy, brother whom I love, I long so fervently for the goal you know of, but how can I attain it? If only everything were already behind me, as it is behind Father, but it takes so much hard work to become a Christian labourer and a preacher of the Gospel and a sower of the Word. You see, Father can count his religious services and Bible readings and visits to the sick and the poor and his written sermons by the thousand, and yet he does not look back, but carries on doing good.

Cast your eye up on high and ask that it be granted to me, as I ask it for you. May He grant your heart's desire, He who knows us better than we know ourselves, and is above prayer and above thought, since His ways are higher than our ways and His thoughts higher than our thoughts, as high as Heaven is above earth. And may the thought of Christ as a Comforter and of God as a lofty dwelling be with you.

Best wishes on your journey, write soon and accept a handshake in my thoughts. Goodbye, and believe me, always

Your loving brother, Vincent

I hope Father will soon be better. Try to be in Etten at Easter, it will be so good to be together again. It may be said of many things in the past, and also of what you have been through: "Thou shalt find it after many days."